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SUBJECT: AL JAZEERA ENGLISH TO START BROADCASTING IN
SINGAPORE

¶1. (U) Summary. Al Jazeera English will likely begin broadcasting in Singapore twenty-four hours a day in the first quarter of 2008, according to Nigel Parsons, Managing Director of Al Jazeera English. On December 4, the Media Development Authority of Singapore granted SingTel a landing license to broadcast Al Jazeera English on mio TV, SingTel's internet protocol television (IPTV) service. Parsons added that Al Jazeera English will also pursue a full cable license to broadcast on StarHub, which reaches more viewers than SingTel. End Summary.

Getting Comfortable with Al Jazeera

¶2. (SBU) After monitoring Al Jazeera English long enough to be familiar and comfortable with the channel and its content, Singapore's Media Development Authority agreed to give SingTel a license to broadcast Al Jazeera English in Singapore on its mio TV, SingTel's internet protocol (IPTV) service, Amy Chua, Director of Media Content at MDA told us. Chua did not expect any problems, but noted that if the channel broadcasts objectionable content, it would be up to SingTel as the supplier to take action and MDA would step in if appropriate action were not taken. Nigel Parsons, Managing Director of Al Jazeera English commented to us that the GOS took a cautious approach, monitoring the channel for some time before they granted a license. Parsons observed, "I wouldn't be surprised if they decided to give us the IPTV license to kind of test the waters."

¶3. (SBU) When asked what prompted the MDA to approve a license for Al Jazeera English at this time, Chua mentioned the popular demand expressed by visitors from the Middle East who want to see Middle East reporting while in Singapore. Krishnasamy Bhavani, Press Secretary at the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MICA) commented that Singapore is surrounded by Muslim nations and needs to offer programming relevant to the region.

Broadcast to Begin in Early 2008

¶4. (U) Al Jazeera English will begin broadcasting as soon as final details are negotiated between the channel and SingTel, according to Parsons. He expects the channel to be on air twenty-four hours a day on mio TV beginning early in the first quarter of 2008. In addition, Parsons noted that the channel signed a non-exclusive agreement with SingTel, so that Al Jazeera English can pursue an additional license with

StarHub (Singapore's main cable service) to become part of that supplier's basic tier service.

15. (U) Al Jazeera English currently has hubs in Kuala Lumpur, Doha, London, and Washington. The broadcasting centers hand off to each other over the course of the day, and SingTel plans to broadcast the channel twenty-four hours a day. Parsons mentioned that the broadcaster hopes to set up new studios in Nairobi and Gaza, and that Latin America is quite high on the channel's priority list as well.

Impact of Al Jazeera in the Region

16. (SBU) Parsons cited two regional examples where Al Jazeera English had led coverage of local events that garnered international attention. He boasted that Al Jazeera was the only broadcaster to remain in Burma throughout the demonstrations and its footage was aired by broadcasters around the world. Regarding the November 25 Indian community demonstration in Kuala Lumpur, Parsons asserted that the local Malaysian media were forced to report the event in full because Al Jazeera English was running it in full on the Astro channel. He commented that Al Jazeera had initially been concerned whether it was seditious to cover an illegal demonstration, and had talked it over with police and local government officials before deciding to broadcast coverage. He claimed the channel placed great importance on being impartial and presented its stories in context. Parsons added that a Malaysian government spokesman in Kuala Lumpur had thanked Al Jazeera English for its impartial coverage of the demonstration.

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17. (SBU) Comment. The GOS clearly considered the ramifications carefully before granting a license for Al Jazeera English to broadcast in Singapore: press reports indicate that MDA took most of the year to reach its decision. The GOS likely welcomed SingTel's application for the license because its mio TV reaches a much smaller audience than rival broadcaster StarHub's cable service. With a target audience of Singapore's 14 percent Malay Muslim population and many visitors familiar with Al Jazeera, the new channel will likely attract a solid market share. GOS officials will watch closely, and determine whether to grant a second broadcast license for StarHub to air Al Jazeera English based on their assessment of the channel's content and Singaporean reaction to the broadcasts. End Comment.

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